A STUDY OF CARSON McCULLERS
—PEOPLE IN THE WORLD OF ILLUSION—

MICHIKO ICHIKAWA

INTRODUCTION

All of us have our own dreams, and all of us have something which we love more than anything else. Though our dreams might never be realized, and our love might never be achieved, we nevertheless dream and love, because if we could not dream nor love, our life would become dull and dry.

In Carson McCullers's works, there are many dreamers and lovers who are by no means ordinary people. Nevertheless, they attract us, and we cannot help sympathizing with them. They are people who escape from the world of reality and live in the world of illusion.

In this thesis I will direct my attention to these people in the world of illusion, as I believe that through an understanding of them we can appreciate the significance of McCullers's works and approach Carson McCullers herself.

In Chapter I, I will discuss how and why McCullers's characters es-

cape from reality to the world of illusion, and what they gain by doing so. In Chapter II, I will analyze the illusions of three important groups of people in her works, and show the power and limits of their illusions. Chapter III will consider the reasons why it is necessary for people to pursue illusions. In Chapter IV, by considering McCullers's viewpoint and her attitude toward her illusionists, I will search for the character of Carson McCullers herself as a person and as a writer.

I. REALITY AND ILLUSION

A. The World of Illusion by Liars and Dreamers

The characters in Carson McCullers's works are often liars or dreamers, and their lies or dreams are sometimes so preposterous that they are beyond belief. For example, Cousin Lymon, the little hunchback in "The Ballad of the Sad Café," brags that he has straddled a huge alligator which was thicker than a hog, while everybody knows he is lying. He is a liar who holds forth "with such lies and boasting that it [is] enough to shrivel the ears."[1] Similarly, Sherman Pew, a young colored foundling in *Clock Without Hands,* fancies that his mother is Marian Anderson, a famous colored singer. His fantasy, however, is crushed when he hears that Marian Anderson has never been married, nor has she had any love affairs.

Just as Sherman's fantasy about his mother is crushed, almost all the fantasies or dreams in McCullers's works are shattered. They are simply too fantastic to be realized, and the lies are too absurd to be believed.

Why, then, do McCullers's characters indulge in such impossible dreams or fantasies? And why do they tell lies, knowing they cannot deceive others nor gain any advantage? Sherman answers these questions when he says, "... A lot of my life I've had to make up stories because the real, actual [*sic*] was either too dull or too hard to take."[2] Sherman, being a foundling and being forced to endure a lonely life, cannot help dreaming in order to gain comfort. He has spent "all his childhood trying to find his mother,"[3] and so it is a marvelous

and comforting fantasy for him that Marian Anderson is his mother. This fantasy has "lifted and made so luminous his searching heart."[4] Though this comforting fantasy is to be crushed, it is clear that it has filled the void in Sherman's life and has relieved him of his loneliness for a while.

Thus, people who are forced to live in the world of harsh or dull reality take refuge in the world of lies or fancies, namely, 'the world of illusion.' The world of illusion is transient, and it is shattered in the end when it is faced with reality. Nevertheless, people try to live in this glamorous world as long as they can in order to gain the comfort or happiness which is missing from their real worlds.

One of McCullers's short stories, "Madame Zilensky and the King of Finland," deals with this need of illusion as compensation for reality. Madame Zilensky is an educator and composer who has a high reputation, but she seems to be "a pathological liar." Mr Brook, her colleague, considers that

> [almost] every word she uttered outside of class was an untruth. If she worked all night, she would go out of her way to tell you she spent the evening at the cinema. If she ate lunch at the Old Tavern, she would be sure to mention that she had lunched with her children at home.[5]

At first sight it seems that there is no motive for her lies; then it becomes clear that she needs to lie:

> All her life long Madame Zilensky had worked—at the piano, teaching, and writing those beautiful and immense twelve symphonies. Day and night she had drudged and struggled and thrown her soul into her work, and there was not much of her left over for anything else. Being human, she suffered from this lack and did what she could to make up for it. If she passed the evening bent over a table in the library and later declared that she had spent that time playing cards, it was as though she had managed to do both those things. Through the lies, she lived vicariously. The lies doubled the little of her existence that was left over from work and augmented the little rag-end of her personal life.[6]

Although Madame Zilensky is an excellent musician, she lives a hollow life. When she realizes this, she lies and creates a world of illusion in which she can live as a more complete human being. Thus, the world

of illusion is necessary for her in order to make up for what is lacking in her real world.

B. The World of Illusion by Lovers

In McCullers's works, lovers also create worlds of illusion and try to escape from the intolerable real world, just as the liars or the dreamers do. It is noticeable that love is often one-sided in her works. Oliver Evans says that the love she treats is " usually unreturned, unrecognized, mistaken for its opposite, or made difficult if not impossible by social and sometimes even biological considerations."[7] For example, in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* Singer, the protagonist, loves the half-witted Antonapoulos, who is only interested in food. In the same way, Biff Brannon, the proprietor of a café, loves a girl, Mick Kelly, but she mistakes his love for hatred. In *Clock Without Hands*, Jester Clane, a white boy, loves Sherman Pew, but it is a difficult love as " Sherman is not only of the same sex as Jester but is also a Negro."[8] Mutual love does not exist in McCullers's works. Thus, there is seldom true communication between the lover and the beloved, the lover most usually suffers from the indifference or hatred of the beloved.

McCullers explains her idea of love in " The Ballad of the Sad Café " as follows:

> First of all, love is a joint experience between two persons—but the fact that it is a joint experience does not mean that it is a similar experience to the two people involved. There are the lover and the beloved, but these two come from different countries. Often the beloved is only a stimulus for all the stored-up love which has lain quiet within the lover for a long time hitherto . . . the value and quality of any love is determined solely by the lover himself.
>
> It is for this reason that most of us would rather love than be loved. Almost everyone wants to be the lover. And the curt truth is that, in a deep secret way, the state of being beloved is intolerable to many. The beloved fears and hates the lover, and with the best reasons. For the lover is for ever trying to strip bare his beloved. The lover craves any possible relation with the beloved, even if this experience can cause him only pain.[9]

This passage shows that McCullers denies the generally accepted idea that love is mutual. The lover is a pursuer or hunter who chases the beloved and tries to rob him of everything. The beloved, who might

be said to be a target for the lover, fears and hates the lover, as he detects that the lover is a hunter and robber. Thus, the love itself is lonely. The lover's knowledge of this deepens his loneliness.

Yet there is one way for the lover to escape from this intolerable loneliness. He can store up a world of love in himself and thus create a world of illusion. Of this McCullers says:

> . . . there is only one thing for the lover to do. He must house his love within himself as best he can; he must create for himself a whole new inward world—a world intense and strange, complete in himself.[10]

The lover can thus create a whole new world, another world in which he can escape from the world of reality. To the extent that this new world is "inward" and created by the lover "for himself," it can be said to be his world of illusion.

Thus, just as liars and dreamers create their worlds of illusion in compensation for their deficiencies in reality, lovers also create worlds of illusion in order to escape from their loneliness. And just as the world of illusion gives the liars and dreamers comfort, it gives the lovers temporary joy or freedom. The love of Frankie Addams in *The Member of the Wedding* is an obvious example. Frankie is a girl of twelve years old who belongs "to no club" and is "a member of nothing in the world."[11] Having no place to belong to, she suffers from a feeling of estrantgement between herself and the world. However, after she has fallen in "love with [the] wedding"[12] of her brother and his bride and is determined to be the member of the wedding, which means when she has created her own world of illusion, she no longer feels estranged from the world. She feels love toward everybody and feels a connection even with strangers. Although ultimately her illusion is shattered by reality, she is released from loneliness, even if for a while.

As love itself is one-sided and lonely, it is essentially impossible for the lover to escape from loneliness. Yet the lover can create a world of illusion as a temporary refuge from his loneliness.

II. PEOPLE IN THE WORLD OF ILLUSION

As has been described in Chapter I, the liars, dreamers, and lovers in Carson McCullers's works create worlds of illusion in order to escape from the harsh realities of their lives and to gain comfort, even if for only a while. These people are usually adolescents, "freaks," and Negroes. The author uses these groups in order to emphasizes the necessity of illusion because these three groups of people are not accepted as true members of the community, and thus are forced to endure an exceedingly lonely life, an exceedingly harsh reality. They do not have mental citizenship in American society: adolescents are separated from normal adults as they are not yet initiated, "freaks" are never acceptable because of their physical deformity, Negroes are not acceptable to the white society of America because of their color. Therefore, they must depend on illusion in order to soften the harshness of reality, and their illusions are related to their search for communication with others in some way or other. In this chapter, the quality of the illusions peculiar to each group will be discussed.

A. Adolescents

An adolescent is a person who has no place where he belongs. He is separated from people because he "is no longer a child nor yet an adult, and even [his] sexual identity is ambiguous."[13] Frankie Addams in *The Member of the Wedding* does not want to belong to the ugly group of children any more, nor can she yet become a member of the club for big girls. Adolescents cannot be sorted out according to their sex, either. In *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, Mick is a tomboy who looks like an overgrown boy. Jester in *Clock Without Hands* is a feminine boy who homosexually loves a Negro boy. An adolescent cannot be a member of any group. He is an "unjoined person"[14] who has to "roam all over the place without never [*sic*] being satisfied."[15]

As adolescents are "unjoined," they cannot grasp their identity. They cannot answer their haunting questions: "Who am I? What am I? Where am I going?"[16] Moreover, their state lacking in iden-

tity makes them afraid. For example, Frankie

> was afraid of these things that made her suddenly wonder who she was, and what she was going to be in the world, and why she was standing at that minute, seeing a light, or listening, or staring up into the sky: alone.[17]

Mick also suffers from the irritation caused by the suspended state of adolescence:

> Her face felt like it was scattered in pieces and she could not keep it straight. The feeling was a whole lot worse than being hungry for any dinner, yet it was like that. I want—I want—I want—was all that she could think about—but just what this real want was she did not know.[18]

In order to escape from his fear or irritation, an adolescent seeks after communication and tries to find his identity. However, as his search is made in the world of illusion, he is unable to establish true communication, and the identity which he finds turns out to be a false one.

For example, Mick Kelly tries to escape from her suspended state by means of love. As she is not a member of any group, she cannot help seeking objects of love and entertaining them one after another in "the inside room,"[19] that is, in her world of illusions and dreams. Now, by having the deaf-mute Singer in the inside room, she escapes from the fear of estrangement. Thinking that he understands everything about her, she trusts in him and feels as if there were some secret feeling between them: "She talked to him more than she had ever talked to a person before .... It was like he was some kind of a great teacher, only because he was a mute he did not teach."[20]

The author, however, shows that there is no true communication between them. For example, Singer, who is a deaf-mute, cannot possibly comprehend music, with which Mick is obsessed. The picture of the sympathetic Singer which Mick has in her mind is nothing more than an illusion which she has made up according to her desire. Actually, as Biff Brannon, one of the main characters, thinks:

> The thing that mattered was the way Blount and Mick made of him [Singer] a sort of home-made God. Owing to the fact he was a mute they were able to give him all the qualities they wanted him to have.[21]

In the end Singer kills himself and denies the possibility of communi-

cation. Thus, the search for communication of one suspended adolescent ends in failure.

As mentioned in Chapter I, Frankie Addams also tries to escape from her suspended state by means of illusion. She seeks communication with others just as Mick does; furthermore, in the process of her search for communication she finds an identity, though ultimately it turns out to be a false one. Frankie is also estranged as an adolescent. She is afraid because the world seems "somehow separate from herself."[22] In the case of Frankie, this feeling of estrangement is intensified by the fear that she might be abnormal. She is afraid that she will be a "Freak" over nine feet tall if she continues to grow. "She was afraid of all the Freaks, for it seemed to her that they had looked at her in a secret way and tried to connect their eyes with hers, as though to say: we know you."[23] The fear that she might be a member of the "Freaks," who are not accepted in the community, intensifies her feeling of estrangement from the world.

Frankie, desiring to escape from her fear, from her separated situation, tries to communicate with others. However, unlike Mick, who tries to communicate with only one person, Singer, Frankie desires to communicate with the whole world. For example, she longs to be connected with soldiers by donating blood to the Red Cross:

> . . . she wanted to donate a quart a week and her blood would be in the veins of Australians and Fighting French and Chinese, all over the whole world, and it would be as though she were close kin to all of these people.[24]

Her desire for communication with the whole world centers on the wedding of her brother and his bride. In the process of searching for a means to be connected with the world, she falls in "love with a wedding."[25] She hits upon an idea: "*They* [her brother and his bride] *are the we of me*,"[26] and she determines to be "a member of the wedding."[27] As Eleanor Wikborg says, "Frankie's membership in the wedding is . . . the means whereby she aspires to her ultimate goal of membership in the world."[28]

> '. . . we're going to more places than you ever thought about or even knew

existed . . . . Alaska, China, Iceland, South America . . . . All over the world . . . .'

'And we will meet them. Everybody. We will just walk up to people and know them right away . . . . We will have thousands of friends, thousands and thousands and thousands of friends. We will belong to so many clubs that we can't even keep track of all of them. We will be members of the whole world. . . .'[29]

Thus, having found a place to belong to, that is, by finding her identity, she fears nothing any more:

Frankie stood looking into the sky. For when the old question came to her —the who she was and what she would be in the world, and why she was standing there that minute—when the old question came to her, she did not feel hurt and unanswered. At last she knew just who she was and understood where she was going. She loved her brother and the bride and she was a member of the wedding. The three of them would go into the world and they would always be together. And finally, after the scared spring and the crazy summer, she was no more afraid.[30]

Frankie, who has found her identity, is now regenerated as F. Jasmine. She feels as if everybody were connected with herself and begins to feel that she can love everything.

It gradually becomes clear, however, that her feeling of connection is an illusion. For example, she talks to a tractor-man who is mending a road, but as the tractor fills the air with its loud noise, he cannot hear her voice, nor can she hear his reply. Moreover, the wedding itself proves to be like a nightmare which she cannot manage, and she finally realizes that she cannot be a member of the wedding. Pulled back to the world of reality, she again suffers from feelings of estrangement.

The whole idea of becoming a member of the wedding, and thus becoming a member of the world, is nothing but an illusion created by an estranged adolescent. The identity which is based on it is also a false one.

Thus, the adolescent's desire to seek for a place to belong to and to seek for identity is frustrated; this experience of frustration is a bitter one. Nevertheless, this is one of the stages of maturity that one must go through. Only after an adolescent experiences the frustrations of his comforting illusions, can he enter the world of adults.

B. "Freaks"

Many of Carson McCullers's characters are deformed in some way or other. Some are physically handicapped, such as the two deaf-mutes, John Singer and Spiros Antonapoulos, in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter.* In "The Ballad of the Sad Café" Miss Amelia is a cross-eyed woman who is over six feet tall, while Cousin Lymon is a hunchback scarcely more than four feet tall and suffering from tuberculosis. There are also sexual impotents, such as Biff Brannon in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* or Captain Penderton in *Reflections in a Golden Eye.* Other characters are mentally deformed, such as Antonapoulos, who is half-witted, or morally deformed, like Marvin Macy in "The Ballad of the Sad Café," a heartless man who has "chopped off the tails of squirrels in the pine-woods just to please his fancy."[31]

These deformed people are the real social misfits. While adolescents can become members of adult society after the bitter experience of frustrated illusion, such "freaks" can never be acceptable because they lack the ordinary means of communication with others. For example, a deaf-mute cannot receive nor return the spoken word, the fundamental and the most effective means of communication. Though love is at the zenith of communication, for a person who is sexually impotent it is barren and meaningless. Nothing can be born from it. Deprived of ordinary means of communication, "freaks" are isolated from society and thus confined to their cells.

They try to free themselves from their cells by means of love and seek communication with the people whom they love. Their efforts, however, are all in vain. The unreturned love of Singer for Antonapoulos is one example of this. Singer, a deaf-mute, devotes himself to Antonapoulos. Through his fascinated eyes Antonapoulos seems always wise and gentle and able to understand everything. Therefore, seeking for communication, his fingers always make various signs eagerly—or even desperately—before Antonapoulos, while the beloved, a half-wit who lives in a mentally blank world, is incapable even of perceiving Singer's love. Such love is thus fruitless, because it cannot

create communication between the lover and the beloved.

Yet the illusion named love has a certain power: it can create a new world of communication with the others around a "freak" for at least a while. In McCullers's works the "freak" who has become a lover rises above his deformity and enters the world of communication. Being a deaf-mute, Singer is physically confined to a world of silence. Ironically, however, his incommunicable love for Antonapoulos places him in the very center of communication. In spite of the fact that he is a deaf-mute, it is with him that people want to talk, for they perceive in his face the look of a lover's peace, wisdom, and sorrow, and think that he who thus loves can heal their own sufferings. People follow him, "converge in him as the spokes of a wheel lead to the centre hub,"[32] and gain comfort and peace from his silent company. In this sense, he acquires spiritual eloquence. The deaf-mute lover becomes 'a singer,' one who sings, in silence, a comforting song which consoles his listeners. Thus, he might be said to have stepped out of his world of silence into a new world of communication.

"The Ballad of the Sad Café" also deals with this power of love. Although love does not have lead to communication between a lover and his beloved, it enables the lover to enter the world of communication with others. For example, Marvin Macy's character changes completely when he falls in love with Miss Amelia. He is a mentally deformed man, who is such a devil of a man that he has been carrying with him the dried and salted ear of a man he killed. In fact, he has been such a mental "freak" that "it could be questioned if such a person had within him a heart and soul."[33] But love changes his character:

> He reformed himself completely. He was good to his brother and foster mother, and he saved his wages and learned thrift. Moreover, he reached out towards God. No longer did he lie around on the floor of the front porch all day Sunday, singing and playing his guitar; he attended church services and was present at all religious meetings. He learned good manners: he trained himself to rise and give his chair to a lady, and he quit swearing and fighting and using holy names in vain.[34]

As it was his mental deformity which isolated him from the society,

the change in his character means that he can now communicate with others. The fact that he attends church means that he has become a member of the community. Thus, the illusion of love enables Marvin to enter the world of communication, though his love for Miss Amelia is itself incommunicable because of her indifference.

In the case of Miss Amelia, her love, and its power, which creates a world of communication, is incarnated as a café. Miss Amelia is a cross-eyed misanthrope who has a passion for fierce lawsuits. It has been said that " if Miss Amelia so much as stumbled over a rock in the road she would glance around instinctively as though looking for something to sue about it."[35] When she falls in love with Cousin Lymon, however, she reduces the number of lawsuits she files and becomes soft and gentle. She changes into a communicative person who goes to revivals and funerals. Moreover, after she falls in love, she establishes a cozy café, a center of communication, in a dreary town which has thus far been " lonesome, sad, and like a place that is far off and estranged from all other places in the world."[36]

> In the dark, silent nights of wintertime the café was the warm centre point of the town, the lights shining so brightly that they could be seen a quarter of a mile away. The great iron stove at the back of the room roared, crackled, and turned red.[37]

The café becomes a place of " company and a genial warmth,"[38] a place which has such qualities as " fellowship, the satisfactions of the belly, and a certain gaiety and grace of behaviour."[39] People can escape from the miseries of life when they are in the café with others:

> The people in the town were . . . proud when sitting at the tables in the café . . . . There, for a few hours at least, the deep bitter knowing that you are not worth much in this world could be laid low.[40]

Thus, the café serves as a place of communication and as a refuge from the harsh reality of life. There, people can gain comfort, even if for only a little while. Lawrence Graver says, " Product of her love, the café is the symbol of the ability of human affection to create intimacy and delight where only barrenness existed before."[41] Amelia's love has the power to create a world of communication around her, a world in

which people can take refuge from their shabby lives.

Thus, a " freak " 's love for his beloved can create around him a new world of communication with others. However, it is also a world of illusion which is to be crushed by reality. Although people converge in Singer and gain comfort from his company, Singer, " the centre hub " of the new world, finally kills himself to enter the world of eternal silence, death. Marvin, fiercely rejected by Amelia, turns into a criminal and is sent off to a penitentiary. When Miss Amelia's love is crushed, the café is closed and boarded up. From inside, a face sometimes looks down, a terrible dim face with crossed eyes which " are turned inward so sharply that they seem to be exchanging with each other one long and secret gaze of grief."[42] Again " the town is dreary."[43] Thus, the " freaks " return to their cells, leaving the others without communication.

C. Negroes

Regarded as constituting the lowest class, Negroes have long functioned as an outlet for white men's frustrations and have thus been estranged from American society. Judge Fox Clane, a white ex-congressman in *Clock Without Hands*, sums it up as follows:

> ' . . . Sammy Lank and poor whites like that have nothing but the colour of their skin. Having no property, no means, nobody to look down on . . . . every man has to have somebody to look down on. So the Sammy Lanks of this world only have the Nigra [*sic*] to look down on. You see, . . . it is a matter of pride . . . . '[44]

A Negro has been used as a tool to preserve the white man's pride, and so he has never been treated as a human being who has his own character. In short, each Negro has been ' invisible ' to white men. Benedict Copeland, a Negro doctor in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter,* is enraged because a Negro is judged only by the color of his skin, and is never judged by his personality, which is invisible to whites:

> All white people looked similar to Negroes but Negroes took care to differentiate between them. On the other hand, all Negroes looked similar to white men but white men did not usually bother to fix the face of a Negro in their

minds. So the white man said, ' What you want, Reverend? '
The familiar joking title nettled him. ' I am not a minister,' he said.[45]

Sherman Pew in *Clock Without Hands* also finds that he is invisible to white people. Feeling an urge to be noticed, he breaks various segregation laws, such as drinking water at a fountain for whites. Nevertheless, nobody notices him. Knowing that no one ever cares more about him than about a dog, his rage deepens.

Thus, a Negro is not admitted to the white-dominated society; in order to bear such a situation, the Negro must rely on illusion. For example, Grandfather in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* has a naive dream. Ploughing in the field, he often dreams of turning white as cotton at the Second Coming. He dreams of it so often that he almost believes that it will be realized during his lifetime. His dream shows his desire to free himself from the racial boundaries and to be accepted in white society as a human being. Therefore, he toils on, believing his dream will come true.

Berenice, the Negro house-keeper in *The Member of the Wedding*, is full of earthly wisdom and serves to pull the imaginative Frankie back to the world of reality. Yet, her blue glass eye shows that she also needs illusion. She has been using a bright blue glass eye since one of her husbands gouged out her gray left eye. This seems to show her desire to communicate with whites as a human being because, in her ideal world, there will be no segregated people; rather, love and peace dominate there:

> . . . the world of the Holy Lord God Berenice Sadie Brown . . . was round and just and reasonable. First, there would be no separate coloured people in the world, but all human beings would be light brown colour with blue eyes and black hair. There would be no coloured people and no white people to make the coloured people feel cheap and sorry all through their lives. No coloured people, but all human men and ladies and children as one loving family on the earth.[46]

She cannot do without her blue eye, without her dream. Nevertheless, the fact that her blue eye is artificial points to the impossibility of realizing her dream.

Sherman cannot fulfill his desire, either. He is determined to be re-

cognized in the white-dominated society. After many unsuccessful trials, he finally moves into the whites' section and makes the white men notice his existence at last. In this point his desire seems to be fulfilled, yet this is an illusion, because the whites have noticed only his physical existence. By bombing him, they deny his existence as a human being and make him eternally invisible.

Thus, the Negroes' dream of being visible in the whites' society, of freeing themselves from racial boundaries, and of communicating with whites on equal terms cannot be achieved.

III. NECESSITY FOR ILLUSION

The comfort given by an illusion is transient, and the world of illusion is always crushed by the reality of life. The isolated people in society—adolescents, "freaks," Negroes—cannot become members of society through illusions. They cannot communicate with others by means of love, nor can they escape from their boundaries by means of dreams. It might be said that the essence of one's existence itself does not allow him to achieve his love nor to realize his dream; namely, a human being is essentially confined to the cell of his being. As Berenice in *The Member of the Wedding* says:

> 'We all of us somehow caught. We born this way or that way and we don't know why. But we caught anyhow. I born Berenice. You born Frankie. John Henry born John Henry. And maybe we wants to widen and bust free. But no matter what we do we still caught. Me is me and you is you and he is he. We each one of us somehow caught all by ourself . . . .'[47]

We are thus separated from each other and are imprisoned in our own cells. Although we try to connect ourselves with others by means of love or dreams, no matter how hard we may try, we remain isolated: "I can't ever be anything else but me, and you can't ever be anything else but you."[48] Therefore, love is in vain, dreams are in vain, and people who live in the world of illusion are doomed to frustration. In this sense, McCullers seems to be pessimistic about the power of illusion.

Nevertheless, McCullers believes in illusion itself. For example, in her works illusion is often the most living part of a person. He attracts others as long as he lives in the world of illusion. The " freak " who loves—Singer, for example—attracts us, and we are fascinated by Frankie's beautiful fantasy. Mick and Frankie become too common to draw our attention when they lose their adolescent dreams. For these people, illusion is their life itself. For example, illusion saves Madame Zilensky from dying mentally. She needs illusion to compensate for reality, and if she cannot live in the world of illusion, her character will collapse. Actually, Mr Brook, who has tried to contradict her lie, feels as if he were a murderer. In this sense, Singer's suicide is symbolic. He kills himself when his illusion is crushed by the death of his beloved; he thus shows that the illusion of love has been his only reason for being.

Moreover, while the outlandish people in the world of illusion are attractive, the people who usually can not or do not love or dream are presented as mean and common in McCullers's works. For example, in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* the author describes an ugly group of workers who would not accept the vision of Jake Blount, a communist who pursues the ideal of reorganizing society. The workers here are lifeless and dull:

> . . . three men sat together on the front steps . . . . One of these was tall and loose-jointed. The other was small and he had a running sore on the corner of his mouth. The third man was dressed in shirt and trousers. He held a straw hat on his knee.
>
> ' Hey,' Jake said.
>
> The three men stared at him with mill-sallow, deadpan faces . . . . ' Don't it make you mad? ' he [Jake] asked.
>
> ' . . . The bastards who own these mills are millionaires. While the doffers and carders and all the people behind the machines . . . can't hardly make enough to keep their guts quiet . . . . don't it make you mad? Don't it? '
>
> . . . The three men looked at him warily. Then the man in the straw hat began to laugh.
>
> The men laughed in the slow and easy way that three men laugh at one.[49]

The townspeople in " The Ballad of the Sad Café," who are convinced that Amelia murdered Lymon and have come to spy on her premises,

are similarly ugly and lifeless. Furthermore, they are almost identical and standardized:

> All at once, as though moved by one will, they walked into the store. At that moment the eight men looked very much alike—all wearing blue overalls, most of them with whitish hair, all pale of face, and all with a set, dreaming look in the eye. What they would have done next no one knows.[50]

Considering these points, McCullers seems to be saying that illusion is the thing which differentiates the man who has illusion from others; namely, through dreams and love one can attain self-expression and self-realization. For example, as has been mentioned above, the picture of a beloved is a reflection of a lover's desire, and to project oneself on an object leads one to express oneself. In this sense, to pursue illusion is valuable, even if it is doomed to end in frustration because of the essential limitations of man's existence.

This explains why those McCullers characters who are living in the world of illusion are so vivid and attractive for us, living in the modern world. As Professor Yuko Eguchi has pointed out in her study of McCullers in *Essays and Studies in British & American Literature*, people in a mass society like America are suffering from dehumanization and impersonalization under the influence of mechanical and materialistic civilization.[51] People in modern society seem to be enjoying material wealth. There are all sorts of things available, and one can choose as he likes. One can enjoy any kind of life style according to his own value judgment. In reality, however, his way of living or his own valuation itself is being standardized in a highly civilized society. Our way of thinking tends to be standardized under the influence of mass media. A flood of standardized commodities are mass-produced, and we have no choice but to use the things everybody else does. In this way, one's own personality or individuality tends to get lost. The mechanical and material civilization is liable to deprive a man of humanity. Living in such society, in order to preserve his own self, one needs to create a world of illusion in which he can express himself and realize himself. The more standardized a society becomes, the more one needs to pursue dreams and love. In this context, we can sympathize with

the outcasts in McCullers's works, because they are the people who are protesting against being standardized in a uniform society and who are struggling to attain self-expression and self-realization as human beings in their own worlds of illusion.

IV. McCULLERS AND HER ILLUSIONISTS

From what angle does Carson McCullers view her people in the world of illusion? The attitude of Mr Brook toward Madame Zilensky in "Madame Zilensky and the King of Finland" seems to give us the answer. As has been mentioned before, Madame Zilensky needs to lie in order to compensate for reality, and her world of illusion is the support of her character. At first Mr Brook considers her a pathological liar. In his judgement as a sensible man, to lie is bad, and so he tries to contradict her. However, he feels as if he were a murderer, and he cannot help approving of her lie at least partially. The story ends like this:

> An hour later, Mr Brook sat looking out of the window of his office. The trees along the quiet Westbridge street were almost bare, and the grey buildings of the college had a calm, sad look. As he idly took in the familiar scene, he noticed the Drakes' old Airedale waddling along down the street. It was a thing he had watched a hundred times before, so what was it that struck him as strange? Then he realized with a kind of cold surprise that the old dog was running along backwards. Mr Brook watched the Airedale until he was out of sight, then resumed his work on the canons which had been turned in by the class in counterpoint.[52]

This passage shows that Mr Brook has changed into a person who can perceive 'the truth' of an illusionist hidden beneath mere facts. Though it is unreal that the dog has run backwards, he considers it to be 'true.' As a matter of fact, Madame Zilensky is a pathological liar, and what she says is unreal. However, under a surface which is unreal for others, there is something which is very 'true' for her. It is easy to consider a person to be a pathological liar, but if one does so, one cannot understand the person in a true sense, nor can he love the person truly.

To try to perceive 'the truth' of a human being which is hidden beneath mere facts is McCullers's attitude of mind, and when one takes such attitude, he can have true compassion for the eccentric people who are estranged from society. Her poem named " Sport Williams " shows this compassion. In the poem she describes a boy who does all sorts of wicked things, such as lying or stealing. It is clear that he is a bad boy, yet the author writes:

> Oh! Sport was a bad boy.
> No one loved him but his mother.
> And when he was suspended, she said, " He was not
> A bad boy . . . "
> But a sad boy . . . " because
> No one loved him but her, his mother.[53]

This explains why, in McCullers's works, there are always people who console the frustrated illusionists and enfold them in their deep love. For example, Portia, the daughter of Doctor Copeland in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, is full of love toward her father, who feels that he has failed in his vision to elevate the social status of Negroes. Doctor Copeland is exhausted after the vain struggle to attain his vision, and the picture of the despairing Copeland makes us feel the harshness of reality. However, the scene in which Portia dresses her depressed father as if he were a baby shows her deep compassion, and it gives the story a sense of hope. In *The Member of the Wedding*, Berenice relieves Frankie of her irritation and fear. Frankie, feeling somehow that everybody is caught in his own cell and cannot communicate with others, is provoked to act restlessly and hysterically. However, when she is on Berenice's warm, sturdy lap, she calms down and feels consoled:

> F. Jasmine rolled her head and rested her face against Berenice's shoulder. She could feel Berenice's soft big ninnas against her back, and her soft wide stomach, her warm solid legs. She had been breathing very fast, but after a minute her breath slowed down so that she breathed in time with Berenice; the two of them were close together as one body . . . .[54]

The illusionists are the outsiders of society, and, in a sense, it is silly to keep pursuing transient illusions which society will not allow them

to realize. Yet, McCullers, who can perceive ' the truth ' of human existence hidden beneath mere facts, does not think that they are silly people; rather, she considers them sad people. She knows the powerlessness and helplessness of these people, and cannot help loving them, just as Mr Brook, Sport's mother, Portia, and Berenice do.

McCullers writes in one of her essays:

> Nature is not abnormal, only lifelessness is abnormal. Anything that pulses and moves and walks around the room, no matter what thing it is doing, is natural and human to a writer . . . . I become the characters I write about and I bless the Latin poet Terence who said, ' Nothing human is alien to me.'[55]

When we read this passage, we are impressed with her humanity. McCullers, who describes the outcasts of society and can say " I become characters I write about," is a person who has a true compassion for all human beings, no matter who they may be.

CONCLUSION

People take refuge into the world of illusion, escaping from the harsh realities of life. In Carson McCullers's works, adolescents, " freaks," and Negroes create their worlds of illusion, seeking communication with others and desiring to free themselves from their own boundaries. Yet, as all human beings are caught in their own cells of existence, it is impossible to connect with others through illusion. Nevertheless, their struggles to live in their worlds of illusion do have meaning. To pursue illusion is valuable, because through such a struggle, a person is trying to achieve self-expression and self-realization in a standardized and dehumanized society. Though some might say that it is silly to keep pursuing illusion in a world of harsh realities, the author has deep compassion for illusionists. As she knows their helplessness and powerlessness, she cannot help loving them. Her love comes from her effort to see ' the truth ' of human existence, under mere fact. McCullers's illusionists are the outcasts of society, but she uses these people because she cannot help sympathizing with them.

Her own life itself shows her sense of love. After having once been

divorced, she remarried the same man, Reeves McCullers, who could not achieve his ambition to be a writer and who had become mentally ruined. This seems to point to her compassion for helpless people.

It might be said that McCullers herself is an illusionist, because to write is a form of struggle for communication. She says, "I suppose a writer writes out of some inward compulsion to transform his own experience . . . into the universal and symbolical."[56] Out of her struggle as an illusionist might come her deep compassion, love, and humanity. When once asked if she believed in fate, Carson McCullers answered:

> "Not Fate. I believe in Grace. Not just God . . . do you know what I mean? Grace comes if you really try, if you believe in something—in people, in the soul. Then something you want happens. I guess it's God mainly. And it is also Love."[57]

All of us are prisoners in our own cells. However, McCullers seems to suggest that we must continue to pursue our illusion, and must try to reach out to others, believing and hoping that some day the miracle of communication will come.

Notes

1. Carson McCullers, "The Ballad of the Sad Café," in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978, p. 49.
2. Carson McCullers, *Clock Without Hands*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977, p. 125.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
5. Carson McCullers, "Madame Zilensky and the King of Finland," in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978, p. 116.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
7. Oliver Evans, *Carson McCullers, Her Life and Work*, London: Peter Owen, 1965, p. 194.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 175.
9. McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, pp. 33–34.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
11. Carson McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977, p. 7.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
13. Evans, p. 102.
14. McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding*, p. 7.

15. Carson McCullers, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977, p. 48.
16. McCullers, *Clock Without Hands*, p. 177.
17. McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding*, p. 32.
18. McCullers, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, p. 50.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 213–214.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
22. McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding*, p. 31.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
28. Eleanor Wikborg, *Carson McCullers' The Member of the Wedding: Aspects of Structure and Style*, Göteborg, Sweden: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1975, p. 83.
29. McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding*, pp. 138–139.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
31. McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, p. 35.
32. McCullers, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, p. 187.
33. McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, p. 35.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
41. Lawrence Graver, " Carson McCullers," in *Seven American Women Writers of the Twentieth Century*, Maureen Howard, ed., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977, p. 292.
42. McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, pp. 7–8.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
44. McCullers, *Clock Without Hands*, p. 191.
45. McCullers, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, p. 229.
46. McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding*, pp. 114–115.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
49. McCullers, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, pp. 61–62.
50. McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, p. 23.
51. Yuko Eguchi, " Carson McCullers: Human Isolation in America," *Essays and Studies in British & American Literature*, Vol. 7, Summer, 1959, pp. 129–146.
52. McCullers, " Madame Zilensky and the King of Finland," p. 120.
53. Carson McCullers, " Sport Williams," in *Sweet as a Pickle and Clean as a Pig*,

Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1964, p. 18.

54. McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding*, pp. 140–141.
55. Carson McCullers, " The Flowering Dream," in *The Mortgaged Heart*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975, p. 282.
56. Carson McCullers, "A Personal Preface," in *The Square Root of Wonderful*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958, p. viii.
57. Nona Balakian, *Critical Encounters: Literary Views and Reviews, 1953–1977*, Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1978, p. 112.

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